BUSINESS: Crude oil falls to its lowest price in nearly two decades. **Page B1**

San Antonio Express-News

EXPRESSNEWS.COM | *Thursday, March 19, 2020 | Vol. 155, No. 171 | The voice of South Texas since 1865 | $2.00*

Cloudy: High 82, Low 60

CORONAVIRUS

More of S.A. is shutting down

VIA is looking at reducing its number of trips

By Bruce Selcraig
STAFF WRITER

VIA Metropolitan Transit's ridership is down sharply amid the coronavirus crisis, and the agency is considering a comparable reduction in daily bus runs to protect drivers' health.

Bus drivers across the country, especially those under union contracts, have said they are dangerously exposed on the front lines of the viral pandemic and should be afforded greater protection, including a reduction in work hours and prompt virus testing when available.

Juan Amaya, president of the Amalgamated Transit Union Local 694 in San Antonio, said he has had discussions with VIA management and is expecting an agreement in which the city's buses would go on a reduced Saturday schedule for six out of seven days, leaving Sunday unchanged.

That would cut the system's approximately 780 daily runs on 96 routes to about 520, he said, and would require reducing the hours of many drivers.

"We want to keep them all on full pay, though," Amaya said. "We don't think it's our fault. This crisis was dropped on all of us."

He said VIA drivers work under a union contract guaranteeing them 80 hours of pay over a two-week period.

A VIA spokeswoman said a reduction in service "is not imminent," though VIA CEO Jeff Arndt suggested earlier this week that a decision was coming "very soon."

The spokeswoman said VIA "is continuing our discussion about how to keep employees whole if they are impacted by

VIA continues on A6

William Luther / Staff photographer

A person goes through the second coronavirus testing location in Bexar County. It was opened at Freeman Coliseum.

Along with the actions that he has taken, Mayor Ron Nirenberg also is urging people to stay at home after 10 p.m.

Kin Man Hui / Staff photographer

More inside

» *Self-isolation in worried time.* **A2**
» *Ventilator nightmare cited.* **A3**
» *All-mail voting is weighed.* **A4**
» *Major surgeries halted.* **A9**
» *U.S., Canada close border.* **A10**
» *Milestone at virus epicenter.* **A11**
» *Language problems.* **A14**
» *Day laborers being hurt.* **B1**
» *Toyota closing S.A. plant.* **B1**
» *Jobless claims skyrocketing.* **B1**

» *For the latest updates, go to* **ExpressNews.com/coronavirus**

Coronavirus at a glance

217,247
Confirmed cases worldwide

7,786
Confirmed cases in U.S.

200
Confirmed cases in Texas

8,784
Deaths worldwide

118
Deaths in U.S.

3
Deaths in Texas

123 evacuees now at Lackland

Source: WHO, CDC

Mayor closes eateries, bars, other sites

By Lauren Caruba and Joshua Fechter
STAFF WRITERS

As the number of coronavirus cases in San Antonio more than doubled to 25 on Wednesday night, Mayor Ron Nirenberg ordered bars and restaurants to close to further reduce the spread of the illness.

Restaurants can continue operating drive-throughs and filling take-out orders for curbside pickup or delivery under Nirenberg's fourth public health emergency declaration.

Nightclubs, gyms, bowling alleys, bingo parlors and theaters, among other businesses, also must close under the order.

But essential businesses, such as grocery stores, gas stations and pharmacies, will remain open.

The closure order – unprecedented in recent memory – was to go into effect at 11:59 p.m. Wednesday.

"It's not going to be comfortable," Nirenberg said. "But it's going to be necessary."

San Antonio was the last major Texas city to order some form of restriction on bars and restaurants in an effort to combat COVID-19. As late as Tuesday, Nirenberg wasn't ready to follow along.

The mayor's change in position coincided with a steep rise in the city's cases from a day earlier, when 11 were confirmed.

Thirteen of the cases remain under investigation by Metro Health to determine how the people were infected. It's not yet clear if any of those resulted from "community spread," or transmission from an unknown local source.

The 12 other cases are related to travel out of state or internationally or close contact with one of those travelers.

University Health System said two more of its health care employees had tested positive for the coronavirus, after announcing earlier this week that one of its doctors had the virus.

A nurse and a resident physician at University Hospital are in isolation at home. UHS said all three cases appear to be linked to travel. The hospital system is tracing the employees' recent contacts to identify the potential exposure of others.

While hospital personnel had

Closings continues on A6

'Wartime president' rolls out 1950 authority

By Tim Sullivan and David Rising
ASSOCIATED PRESS

MINNEAPOLIS – President Donald Trump invoked emergency authority Wednesday to marshal industry to fight the coronavirus.

Meanwhile, the economic fallout from the crisis mounted, with word that nearly the entire U.S. auto industry is shutting down its North American factories to protect workers.

On a day of head-spinning developments:

Stocks tumbled again on Wall Street on fears of a prolonged recession, falling so fast they triggered another automatic trading halt.

The Dow Jones Industrial Average shed more than 1,300 points, or over 6 percent, and now has lost nearly all of the big gains it had posted since Trump's inauguration.

More borders slammed shut across Europe and North America, with the U.S. and Canada closing their boundary to all but essential travel, and Trump saying he plans to assert extraordinary powers to immediately turn back to Mexico anyone who crosses over the southern border illegally.

The White House pressed Congress to swiftly pass a potentially $1 trillion rescue package to prop up the economy and speed relief checks to Americans in a matter of weeks.

Calling himself a "wartime president," Trump invoked the Defense Production Act of 1950 to steer industrial output and overcome shortages of face masks, ventilators and other supplies as hospitals brace for an expected onslaught of cases.

Authority continues on A7

$104 billion relief package means that big bucks soon will be flowing to Texas

By Benjamin Wermund
WASHINGTON BUREAU

WASHINGTON – Free coronavirus testing is coming to Texas, along with a big boost in Medicaid funding, unemployment insurance for those without work during the pandemic and paid sick leave for up to 3 million people.

A $104 billion relief package aimed at curbing the spread of the virus and slowing its havoc on the economy cleared the Senate on Wednesday on a 90-8 vote after passing the House of Representatives over the weekend.

Both Texas senators and all but six members of Congress from Texas – all Republicans – voted for the measure, which was the result of lengthy negotiations between House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and the White House.

Saul Loeb / Getty Images

Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell leaves during a break in votes on the relief bill.

While lawmakers say the aid is urgently needed – and has been for days as it lingered in Congress – they also agree it doesn't go nearly far enough, with many pointing to the paid sick leave provision that omits much of the workforce, among other things.

Lawmakers now are crafting an economic stimulus package that could cost up to $1 trillion.

The Trump administration and many in Congress are calling for it to include a stipend from the federal government paid directly to some Americans.

"I think we already are on a war footing, and we've got to beat this virus," Sen. John Cornyn said. "I just think this is an extraordinary emergency, and we ought to consider everything that would solve the problem, including things I wouldn't ordinarily agree to doing."

The bill that passed Congress on Wednesday expands family leave, provides meals for the elderly and children, waives work-search requirements for unemployment benefits and more.

It also increases the federal matching rate for Medicaid, which could send an extra $2.5 billion to Texas alone, if left in place through the end of the year, according to estimates by the left-leaning Center on Budget and Policy Priorities.

It offers free COVID-19 testing for all Americans, though testing remains un-

Relief continues on A6

DEPRESSION?
ANXIETY?
ARTHRITIS?
CAN'T SLEEP?
CBD CAN HELP!

30ml CBD Oil
600mg - $29.95
1200mg - $59.90
3000mg - $99.90

8oz CBD Lotion
1000mg - $54.95
2500mg - $89.95

To **order** call
830-428-6489
or **shop online** at
www.gamcbd.com

Free Shipping on ***ALL*** Orders!

green Acres
MANUFACTURING

Best Prices, Top Quality, 3rd Party Lab Tested

GET THE MOST FROM YOUR SUBSCRIPTION. If you subscribe to the print newspaper, you also have access to **ExpressNews.com**. It's already yours!

18780 15406
6 D 8